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THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 52/211 B of 19 December 1997, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it every three months during its fifty-second session on the progress of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA). The present report, which covers developments since the report of the Secretary-General of 19 June 1998 (A/52/957-S/1998/532), is also submitted in response to requests by the Security Council for regular information on developments in Afghanistan.

II. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN

2. During the period covered by this report, events in Afghanistan followed a predictably unsettling pattern. In the aftermath of the breakdown of the intra-Afghan talks in the joint Steering Committee for the ulema commission and the subsequent abandonment of the process by the Taliban, both sides engaged in verbal recriminations, each accusing the other of causing the failure of the talks. At the same time, the leaders from each side with whom UNSMA made contact continued to profess their commitment to the search for a peaceful settlement through some other form of dialogue, some even inviting the United Nations to devise a medium for such resumed contact.

3. This brief period of optimism ended, however, when both sides abandoned their commitment not to launch major military offensives against each other during the Steering Committee talks. They ignored the repeated appeals by UNSMA, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the international community at large to maintain the moratorium on major offensives even after the

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collapse of the talks in Islamabad. A tense atmosphere prevailed as attacks by one side against the other increased rapidly and sharply.

4. The United Front (UF) forces under Commander Ahmed Shah Masood intensified their rocket attacks on Kabul International Airport; the rockets sometimes missed their target and landed in neighbouring areas, with severe consequences for innocent civilian populations and installations. According to the UNSMA count, a total of 84 rockets landed in the Kabul airport area during the period 1 June through 4 September 1998. Of these, 29 were launched during the month of June, 23 in July and 28 in the first four days of September alone. On one occasion, a rocket landed at the airport as a United Nations aircraft was beginning to taxi for takeoff; the plane narrowly escaped being hit.

5. At the beginning of June, the UF forces under General Abdul Rashid Dostum, leader of the Jumbesh party, launched an attack against the Taliban forces in the Gormach-Bala Murgab area in the north-western province of Badghis, near the Afghanistan/Turkmenistan border. Helped by local Taliban elements that had changed sides, General Dostum's forces pushed the Taliban beyond the Bala-Murghab River down towards Qala-I-Naw, with the presumed intention of driving the Taliban out of Badghis Province. The Taliban repelled the attack and eventually managed to hold the Jumbesh forces at the original front lines.

6. By far the biggest and most serious military offensive was launched by the Taliban forces against the UF area starting on 12 July 1998. In a swift move, the Taliban overwhelmed the Jumbesh forces and captured Maimana, the provincial capital of Faryab, on 12 July. They went on to capture Sheberghan, the provincial capital of Jozjan, General Dostum's stronghold, on 2 August and Mazar-i-Sharif itself on 8 August. The fall of Mazar-i-Sharif, which was the only major city not controlled by the Taliban, was a severe setback to the UF. The Taliban continued their advance and captured the city of Bamiyan in central Afghanistan on 13 September.

7. There have been many reports of alleged external interference, most of it covert. UNSMA has received reports of large numbers of non-Afghans, most of allegedly Pakistani origin, engaging in all aspects of the fighting alongside the Taliban. UNSMA has been shown and has interviewed in Bamiyan a number of captured fighters. All admitted to being Pakistani but they claimed to be independent and private adventurers fighting for a cause, without affiliation to any official institution of the Pakistani Government.

8. Meanwhile, the Taliban have levelled counter-accusations against UF factions in relation to the massive and sophisticated military assistance said to be persistently procured by those factions from their external supporters. The Taliban have claimed that their advancing forces discovered and captured a depot of missiles (of the export Frog-7 version, with a range of 70 kilometres, each capable of carrying a charge of 450 kilograms) as well as a missile launcher, all said to have been in the military inventory of Ismaeli leader Sayed Mansour Nadiri. They have also reported the capture in Mazar-i-Sharif of some 35 Iranian lorry drivers whom they have accused of transporting war matériel from the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UF forces. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which is seeking the drivers' release, has described them as

innocent civilians engaged at the time in transporting commercial and humanitarian goods to northern Afghanistan.

9. The military escalation and its attendant political uncertainty have been followed by a discernible trend of hostility, particularly within Taliban circles, towards the community of international workers in the country. This was manifest in the Taliban decree requiring international non-governmental organizations in Kabul to relocate their offices to one building complex on the edge of the city, an order that was opposed by virtually all non-governmental organizations. All international non-governmental organization workers were subsequently expelled by the Taliban from Kabul. Furthermore, the community of international workers received security warnings of possible attacks by certain ultra-religious fundamentalist groups against non-Muslim international personnel. On 20 August, the United States of America, in the aftermath of the terrorist bombing of its embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, launched retaliatory missile attacks against certain targets in Afghanistan said to be centres of training for international terrorist activities.

10. All the above-mentioned events conspired to create a tense atmosphere, which inevitably affected relations between the Taliban authorities and the community of international workers in Afghanistan. Two local United Nations workers were abducted in Jalalabad on 13 July and were later found murdered elsewhere in circumstances that still remain to be explained by the Taliban authorities. The security situation deteriorated to the extent that two UNSMA officials were deliberately shot at and severely wounded in Kabul on 21 August, one later dying from his wounds. It was then decided to withdraw all United Nations agency workers from Afghanistan until the security situation proved conducive to their return.

11. Against the background of tension between the Taliban and the community of international workers in Afghanistan, and in the aftermath of the Taliban territorial acquisitions, both described above, three developments must be highlighted, namely, the fatal attack on UNSMA officials in Kabul, the case of the Iranian diplomats first reported missing (later acknowledged as killed) and the reactions of neighbouring countries.

A. Attack on special mission personnel

12. On 21 August, at about 7.30 a.m., two UNSMA officials, a Political Affairs Officer and a Deputy Military Adviser, while travelling to the UNSMA office in a clearly marked United Nations vehicle, were intercepted and rammed by a vehicle bearing official Taliban markings coming from the opposite direction, from which an unidentified gunman jumped out and began shooting indiscriminately at the two United Nations officials. Both of them were severely hurt; the Deputy Military Adviser, Lt. Col. Carmine Calo (Italy), died from his wounds the following day. This terrible tragedy was the first of its kind since the establishment of a United Nations peace mission for Afghanistan in May 1988.

13. The Security Council and the entire international community have condemned this violent attack on innocent United Nations officials as well as the murder of the two Afghan United Nations workers in Jalalabad. In its resolution

1193 (1998) of 28 August 1998, the Security Council, inter alia, condemned the attacks on the United Nations personnel in the Taliban-held territories in Afghanistan. In a presidential statement dated 6 August 1998 (S/PRST/1998/24), the members of the Council expressed grave concern at the new sharp escalation of the military confrontation and condemned the killing of the two Afghan United Nations workers in Jalalabad. I have expressed my regret to the Government of Italy and have offered my personal condolences to Lt. Col. Calo's family. Meanwhile, I requested a full report from the Taliban authorities of their investigations into all aspects of the incident, including the identities of the attackers, their motives and information on the nature of judicial proceedings in respect of the culprits. The Taliban authorities expressed regret for the incident, and informed the United Nations that they had arrested two suspects, allegedly of Pakistani nationality, in connection with the case. A full report on the incident, as requested by the United Nations, is still to be provided, however. In response to our enquiries, the Government of Pakistan has said that it cannot identify the two suspects in Taliban custody.

B. Killing of the Iranian diplomats

14. Following the Taliban's entry into and occupation of the city of Mazar-i-Sharif, the Islamic Republic of Iran reported that 11 of its diplomats, as well as an Iranian press correspondent, all stationed at the Iranian Consulate in the city at the time, were missing. On 10 September, the Taliban announced that the bodies of nine of those diplomats had been recovered. They said that the diplomats had been killed by Taliban soldiers, but that they had acted without instructions.

15. This matter has engendered worldwide condemnation and provoked international diplomatic concern. I issued a statement on 11 September strongly condemning these cruel murders and violations of international law and calling for an urgent investigation so that the perpetrators could be brought to justice. On 15 September, the Security Council issued a presidential statement strongly condemning the murders, which, it said, had seriously increased tension in the region (S/PRST/1998/27).

C. Effect on neighbouring countries

16. The Taliban's advances, particularly to the borders of the Central Asian Republics, have caused apprehension and alarm among those countries. First and foremost, they fear cross-border refugee flows as people try to escape from possible Taliban control and harassment. They are also leery of the possible spread of the fundamentalist brand of Islam espoused by the Taliban, which they fear could disrupt their own civil societies. Already, a high-level meeting of four Central Asian Republics has been held in Tashkent in order to map out a common strategy on how to prevent or deal with the negative consequences of any spillover from the Taliban advances. Moreover, current developments threaten the transport and commercial arrangements that might otherwise be contemplated, especially between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan and beyond. The Taliban, for their part, have repeatedly denied having any extraterritorial designs.

17. The Islamic Republic of Iran has reacted vehemently to the latest developments. Tensions had been rising steadily between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Taliban following the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif on 8 August and the disappearance of the 11 diplomats and journalist. The situation grew even worse when the Taliban acknowledged on 10 September that 9 of the 11 had been killed by Taliban forces (though the Taliban claimed that the forces had acted on their own). After initial military exercises on the border involving 70,000 troops in early September, the Islamic Republic of Iran announced on 12 September that it would conduct further military manoeuvres involving an additional 200,000 troops. Comments by top Iranian leaders as quoted by the media indicate that the Islamic Republic of Iran may be contemplating some sort of military response. The Taliban have taken precautionary measures to reinforce their borders with the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the deployment of supplementary forces.

D. Alleged human rights violations

18. Concerns have been expressed about the fate of the Hazara Shiite population in Bamiyan in the wake of allegations of massacres targeting Shiite Moslems following the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif on 8 August. Some independent organizations, such as Amnesty International, have reported that as many as 2,000 people may have been massacred by the Taliban. However, such reports have not, as yet, been confirmed. In my statement of 11 September, I appealed to all Afghan warring parties, in particular the Taliban, to respect the human rights of all Afghan ethnic and religious groups. I reiterated these concerns when I met with the Permanent Representatives of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on 14 September. The Taliban have consistently denied these allegations and indicated that their troops are under strict orders not to brutalize the population under their occupation.

III. ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIAL MISSION

19. After the collapse of the ulema process, UNSMA continued its normal programme of contacts with the various leaders of Afghanistan, consultations with intergovernmental groups in the region and regular activities within the community of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations under the common programming arrangements for Afghanistan. UNSMA also held several sessions with the relevant officials of the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representatives of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Islamabad.

20. Early in July, UNSMA was informed by Pakistan of an arrangement under way with the Islamic Republic of Iran for a joint peace initiative for Afghanistan. This initiative was to be conducted discreetly without the participation of the United Nations and OIC, although Pakistan promised to keep UNSMA regularly informed of the progress. Two missions were undertaken by these Governments, one to shuttle between Mazar-i-Sharif and Kandahar and the other, at a higher level, to consult alternately in Tehran and Islamabad.

21. On 14 July, the Government of Pakistan provided to UNSMA a progress report on the joint peace initiative, including the text of a statement prepared by both Governments, intended for review at a meeting of the "six plus two" group at United Nations Headquarters. Unfortunately, events have overtaken this worthwhile exercise and the military situation has made it redundant.

22. In pursuance of the common endeavours under the common programming scheme, UNSMA intensified its contacts with United Nations agencies and other international organizations in an integrated manner. It participated in the relief effort for the earthquake calamity in northern Afghanistan, often lending its aircraft for delivery of relief supplies. UNSMA also participated in the Joint Consultative Committee under the memorandum of understanding, with particular reference to the question mentioned above of the relocation of the international non-governmental organizations to one operational building complex in Kabul.

23. On 23 July, UNSMA led a delegation representing the community of United Nations agencies operating in Afghanistan to Jalalabad for the purpose of making representations to the Governor of Nangarhar Province regarding the abduction and murder of two Afghan United Nations workers there. At the time of the writing of the present report, United Nations agencies are still awaiting a full report of inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the abduction and murders, as promised by the Taliban Governor.

24. UNSMA has also maintained its contacts with various non-military Afghan groups and individuals, particularly among the ranks of refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, as well as Afghan residents abroad. It has noted that in these groups there can be found large numbers of Afghanistan's intelligentsia, men and women of high education, as well as professional, business and administrative experience, whose skill could be vital in the future reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country's infrastructure. UNSMA has therefore followed their activities with interest, including a meeting in Bonn in July attended by some 150 prominent Afghans who discussed matters relating to the restoration of peace in Afghanistan.

IV. MY SPECIAL ENVOY AND ACTIVITIES AT UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

25. During the reporting period, my Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs held three meetings of the "six plus two" informal group in order to address the Afghan question. The group comprises Afghanistan's six immediate neighbours - China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - as well as the Russian Federation and the United States.

26. The second meeting was convened urgently on 21 August in order to consider the developments in Afghanistan and assess their implications for the efforts to bring about peace in that country. The delegations shared their concern about the escalating fighting in Afghanistan and agreed to continue to follow the situation closely.

27. I convened and chaired the third "six plus two" meeting, at the level of Foreign Ministers, on 21 September. The meeting concluded by adopting "points of common understanding", the text of which is annexed to the present report.

28. During the reporting period, Mr. Brahimi visited Saudi Arabia for consultations with Saudi officials. The "six plus two" group supported my decision to send Mr. Brahimi to the region with a view to advancing the goals of the "points of common understanding". My Special Envoy's mission will commence on 4 October with a visit to Tehran, to be followed by visits to Pakistan and possibly other countries in the region.

V. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

A. Humanitarian situation

29. The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate, taxing the coping mechanisms and energies of even the most resilient strata of Afghan society. The Taliban made considerable gains in July, August and September. Anti-Taliban forces have consolidated with clear intentions of defending Badakshan Province, the Panjshir region and other areas. The residue of the defeated northern alliance forces of General Dostum has dissipated, but some signs of its reformation in part, given the motivation, coordination and logistic support, are still present. Forces loyal to Commander Masood, given conducive circumstances, are capable of mounting a serious threat to Kabul as long as he retains access to vital airfields (Bagram and Faizabad). Expectations of peace and stability in the country appear relatively remote.

30. During the months of July and August, all international staff of the United Nations and its specialized agencies as well as most non-governmental organizations, but not the international staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), were compelled to relocate from Afghanistan. Three events contributed to the withdrawal of the international staff: (a) the order by the Kabul authorities, in July, for non-governmental organizations to relocate to the Polytechnic building; (b) increased fighting in August in the northern and central regions; and (c) the missile attack by the United States, in late August, on suspected terrorists' training camps in Khost. United Nations programmes are continuing under the management and implementation of national staff members.

31. Following a démarche from the Taliban authorities on 14 September for the United Nations to provide humanitarian assistance to populations in Bamiyan Province, the United Nations agreed to send a humanitarian assessment mission to Bamiyan. Taliban representatives were notified that the mission would be undertaken on an exceptional basis and would not imply a full-scale return of United Nations international staff to Afghanistan. Taliban authorities were also informed that the mission was conditional upon the authorities' guaranteeing the safety of United Nations personnel, and then only on the following basis: (a) direct flights by United Nations planes into and out of Bamiyan; (b) provision of Taliban escorts for the duration of the mission; (c) no overnight stays by United Nations personnel owing to security constraints; (d) free use by mission personnel of United Nations communication

equipment; and (e) unfettered access by the mission to all affected populations in the Bamiyan area. While the Taliban authorities initially agreed to all these conditions, they later informed the United Nations that Bamiyan airport was damaged and United Nations flights would be unable to land. Although the United Nations has continued to confirm its readiness to conduct an assessment mission, Taliban authorities have yet to grant the necessary flight clearance.

32. In the meantime, three locally recruited staff members remain imprisoned in Kabul without charges being filed. Large numbers of looted United Nations stores and equipment remain unrecovered and reports on the murders of two locally recruited staff in Jalalabad and that of an international staff member in Kabul are still outstanding. There is a continued perception of tension in the wake of the United States missile strikes.

33. Following the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the Kabul authorities and the United Nations in May 1998, several rounds of Joint Consultative Committee meetings took place from late June to late August (when they were suspended because of the evacuation of all international staff from Afghanistan). The latest round of meetings, in mid-August, took place in the context of a message from United Nations Headquarters to the Kabul authorities indicating that, should there not be clear progress by 31 August 1998 on several issues, namely, the expulsion of non-governmental organizations, the security of staff, access to health and education, and the "maharam" issue, the United Nations would review all options with respect to the future of its programmes in Afghanistan.

34. In July 1998, non-governmental organizations were informed that they would either have to move into a common compound in Kabul or leave the country. On 20 July, Taliban authorities visited every non-governmental organization in Kabul and instructed those who refused to move to leave Kabul immediately. Offices of departing non-governmental organizations were sealed. That same day, the European Community Humanitarian Office decided to suspend all its funding for Kabul programmes. After initial objections to the inclusion of this issue in the Joint Consultative Committee process, the Committee finally agreed, in its last meeting on 12 August, on the establishment of a tripartite commission that would look into all aspects of the relocation so as to come to a mutually agreeable solution. The agreement specified that, pending the rehabilitation of the agreed site, non-governmental organizations were welcome to resume their programmes from their existing Kabul offices. However, subsequent security-related problems have left the Joint Consultative Committee process on hold.

35. While still recovering from the damage caused by the February earthquake, the same remote and mountainous region of the Takhar and Badakhshan Provinces was struck on 30 May by a more powerful earthquake, measured at between 6.9 and 7.1 on the Richter scale, killing 4,000 people and affecting 127 villages, destroying some 17,000 houses. Humanitarian organizations, including the United Nations, ICRC and non-governmental organizations, supported by donor Governments, mounted massive relief operations. At the end of June, non-governmental organizations that had been working on emergency distributions planned to facilitate the reconstruction of 17,000 houses in the three districts. At the end of August, reconstruction work that had started in the affected western zone and that had slowed down because of the security

situation, was still going on. It is possible that, in the coming winter, some villages will have to be provided with support if the construction work is not completed.

36. Since a World Food Programme convoy delivered 800 metric tons of wheat into Hazarajat and 200 metric tons of wheat into Taliban-controlled Ghorband Valley in late May, it has not been possible to secure guarantees from the Taliban and Hezb-i-Wahdat authorities so that a second consignment of a further 1,000 metric tons of food assistance might be transported into the area. In view of this and of the increased difficulties in transporting food on commercial trucks from northern Afghanistan into Hazarajat, it is expected that there could be major food shortages in the area during the winter.

37. Recent military advances by the Taliban into the Bamiyan area of the Hazarajat region have increased fears among the population about personal safety and possible military exercises that might include ethnic or religious targeting.

38. Collaborative efforts to realize a principled approach towards peace and reconstruction continue. In August, the strategic framework for Afghanistan was issued, which defines the principles, goals and institutional arrangements for a more coherent, effective and integrated political strategy and assistance programme. In the field, notwithstanding the withdrawal of international staff from Afghanistan, implementation has begun of plans for common programming assistance, notably for the establishment of the Afghanistan Programming Board. The Board will include representatives from the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, ICRC/International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and major donor countries.

39. In the past few months, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan has been forced to suspend or slow down activities owing to United Nations suspensions in parts of the country and funding problems with some of the projects not directly funded by the United Nations. As a consequence, it is anticipated that the Programme will not be able to achieve all of its targets set for the year. The Programme has nonetheless achieved quite significant outputs during 1998, including the clearance of 15.9 square kilometres of mined area and 13.7 square kilometres of former battlefields, as well as the survey of 37.6 sq km of mine- and unexploded ordnance-contaminated land. In the same period, 386,000 people have received mine-awareness training. Despite the political tensions, the Programme continues to be widely accepted and is well respected by all factions.

40. As to refugee repatriation, during the period from 15 June to September 1998, five groups of Afghan refugees, totalling 2,805 persons, returned from Pakistan to eastern and central Afghanistan, under the new group repatriation scheme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This significantly boosted returnee figures for the first eight months of the year, which currently stand at more than 20,000 - double the number for the same period in 1997.

41. As at 8 September 1998, some US$ 54 million has been contributed or pledged for projects in the 1998 appeal for assistance to Afghanistan, representing

35 per cent of the appeal requirements of $157 million. In addition, some $30 million has been contributed or pledged for non-appeal projects. Therefore, the total amount of humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan so far this year is $84 million.

B. Human rights

42. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has been preparing to embark on a full investigation of massive human rights violations that were alleged to have been committed in northern Afghanistan during 1997. In May, OHCHR dispatched an exploratory mission to northern Afghanistan in order to determine ways and means of launching a full investigation into the allegations. The mission submitted a report to OHCHR in June. A project document for the proposed investigation mission was finalized in July. Meanwhile, OHCHR has approached potential donor countries that might agree to fund the envisaged investigation. I was grateful that a number of those approached expressed immediate interest in providing funds.

43. However, as explained earlier in this report, security conditions on the ground have deteriorated steadily owing to intensified fighting, culminating in the withdrawal of all United Nations international staff in August. Under the current circumstances, it is difficult to foresee the dispatch of the investigation mission in the foreseeable future.

44. The recent Taliban advances in the north of the country and more recently around Bamiyan have led to numerous reports of alleged massive violations of human rights by the advancing Taliban forces. The Taliban themselves have denied all these reports and have accused their opponents of committing atrocities and massacres. The United Nations is considering, on an urgent basis, how to seek to investigate these allegations and ensure respect for the basic human rights of all the Afghan people.

VI. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

45. The situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated significantly owing to the intensified fighting between the UF and the Taliban following the collapse of the ulema process in June. The prolonged civil war in Afghanistan, itself a massive humanitarian tragedy, is now threatening to become a regional conflict, and poses a real danger to stability in the region. Together with the endless suffering of the Afghan people, this is a cause of deep concern to me and to the international community at large.

46. As the fighting intensified, I have repeatedly issued appeals to the Afghan warring factions, as well as to those outside Powers that continue to fuel the conflict, for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, to be followed by the resumption of political negotiations. In doing so, I have reiterated that even if one party were to overwhelm the others by force, the conflict would not end, but would merely enter a new phase. Sadly, these appeals, as well as resolutions and presidential statements of the Security Council, appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

47. I repeat my appeal to all the Afghan factions, in particular the Taliban, to respect the human rights of the people under their control. I also stress that cultural and historic relics of Afghanistan, including the statues of Buddha in Bamiyan, are the common heritage of mankind and should be protected by all. I remind the Afghan factions that the international community is watching closely not only their words but also their deeds.

48. The mission of Mr. Brahimi is of critical importance. The outcome of his efforts will depend primarily upon the determination of all parties involved, Afghan as well as their neighbours, to reach agreement on a pragmatic and practical formula to return Afghanistan to stability and an appreciable degree of normality. This would make possible further endeavours to achieve a durable political solution so that the peoples of Afghanistan can coexist in peace.

49. My annual report to the General Assembly on the situation in Afghanistan, to be issued in the coming period, will contain a more comprehensive analysis of the implications of the developments outlined above, as well as my recommendations concerning the future role of the United Nations in Afghanistan.

50. Finally, I would like to renew my condolences to the Government of Italy and the family of Lt. Col. Calo, who gave his life in the line of duty and for the cause of peace in Afghanistan.

Annex

MEETING OF THE "SIX PLUS TWO" GROUP AT THE LEVEL OF FOREIGN MINISTER, UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, 21 SEPTEMBER 1998

Points of common understanding

- In accordance with Security Council resolution 1193 (1998) and with a view to ending conflict in Afghanistan, and ending further bloodshed, the Taliban and other parties should declare an immediate ceasefire and undertake negotiations aimed at achieving a political settlement culminating in the establishment of a broad-based, multi-ethnic, representative government.

- All forces should immediately release non-combatants in detention, including Iranians.

- The Taliban should expedite the return of the remains of the three Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan, cooperate fully with an international investigation into the killings of Iranian diplomats and United Nations staff in Afghanistan and bring the guilty parties to justice.

- The United Nations should investigate the reports of mass killings and mass graves in Afghanistan.

- The Taliban should fully respect international humanitarian law and human rights, including the rights of women, cease providing a haven to international terrorists residing on its soil and prevent the production and trafficking of narcotics.

- United Nations humanitarian assistance should be resumed as soon as possible, with all factions providing safe and secure conditions under internationally accepted norms.

- With a view to reducing tensions in the region, all parties should exercise maximum restraint and resolve their disputes peacefully, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1193 (1998).

- The "six plus two" group takes note of the proposal of Uzbekistan that a future meeting of the group take place in Uzbekistan.

- The "six plus two" group supports the Secretary-General's decision to send his Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, to the region with a view to advancing these goals and those contained in the approved talking points of 3 March 1998, and to report his findings and recommendations to the group and to seek the participation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in this mission.